

The Dewey-Burdock mine would suck up as much as 8,500 gallons of groundwater per minute from the Inyan Kara aquifer to extract as much as 10 million pounds of ore in total. Lakota say the project violates both the 1868 US-Lakota treaty and federal environmental laws by failing to take into account the sacred nature of the site. If the mine is built, they say, burial grounds would be destroyed and the region's waters permanently tainted.

And it could set precedents forcing federal regulators to protect Indigenous sites and take tribes' claims more seriously.

In 2012, Stands and other Lakota women supported efforts to lobby the EPA to clean up the open pits around Edgemont. As the agency began to investigate the source of the contamination, non-Native landowners barred agents from taking samples at defunct mining sites. The EPA had to rely on sampling data that Powertech collected while preparing its application to open the Dewey-Burdock mine. Based on that data, regulators concluded in 2016 that the region's water naturally contained high levels of uranium and did not require cleanup.

According to the tribe and local geologists, Powertech failed to collect enough data to prove that the mine would not contaminate groundwater, and did not adequately assess how it would affect sites of cultural importance.

Having lost their claims about environmental harm, the tribe's lawyers are still trying to convince regulators that the uranium mine would irreparably damage Lakota burial grounds, places of ceremony, and other sacred sites.